

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
Testimony in support of House Bill 189, January 18, 2007

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) are members of the Flathead Basin Commission (FBC) by legislation. Tribal Chairman James Steele is the official Tribal representative and Clayton Matt is the alternate. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes offer the following testimony in support of House Bill 189.

Based on thousands of years of occupation, the aboriginal territory of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes includes, but is not limited to, Western Montana. Our present homeland is the Flathead Reservation located in the center of Western Montana. The Flathead River flows out of Canada, enters Flathead Lake near Summers, Montana, exits Flathead Lake near Polson, Montana and continues south through the center of the Flathead Reservation and joins the Clark Fork River near the south west corner of the Reservation. The CSKT own the bed and banks of the south half of Flathead Lake.

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes are deeply concerned about the water quality of Flathead River and Flathead Lake. The upper Flathead drainage in Montana is one of the fastest growing areas in the State of Montana. Growth and development in the upper basin contribute to the ever increasing threats to water quality of Flathead River and Flathead Lake.

We are also concerned about threats to Flathead River and Flathead Lake water quality from coal mining in the upper Flathead drainage in British Columbia, Canada. If permitted, the mining operation will destroy a pristine part of the landscape in the upper Flathead in British Columbia. The mining operation will contribute contaminants to the Flathead drainage and any failure of any part of the mine operation will cause even greater catastrophic damage to the landscape and the water resources. The removal of the mountain to mine the coal will be permanent and the damage to the water quality of Flathead River and Flathead Lake will be handed down to future generations.

As a member of the Flathead Basin Commission we participated in the FBC strategic planning process. The strategic plan includes a component designed to monitor water quality for long term trends, which will help in understanding water quality impacts from growth, and monitoring for baseline conditions to help address water quality impacts from coal mining in the upper Flathead drainage in Canada.

The CSKT support HB 189. It will help the Flathead Basin Commission carry out their monitoring plan for the Flathead Basin. Establishment of long-term water quality trend analysis, which coordinates data collection between and among all Flathead Basin Commission members, and the establishment of baseline water quality conditions for monitoring impacts from coal mining, is critical to future generations of Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and all citizens of Montana.

If you have any questions please contact James Steele, Chairman, Tribal Council at 675-2700 or Clayton Matt, Natural Resource Department Head at 883-2888.